DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 795 TM 021 324

AUTHOR Colbert, Joel A.; And Others
TITLE The Relationship between Assessment and Support of Beginning Teachers: Where Do We Go from Here?
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Teacher Induction; *Beginning Teachers; Competence; Criteria; *Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Faculty Mobility; *Mentors; *Professional Development; *Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Supply and Demand; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Proj CA; California; Support Systems

ABSTRACT

As one of several efforts to address the low retention rates of beginning teachers in California schools, the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Project (BTSA) is providing support for new teachers along with a component that assesses their classroom competencies. The assessment component and planned evaluation studies are described. BTSA will use the Educational Testing Service's (ETS) Praxis III assessment program, which is designed to provide data on 19 criteria clustered into 4 domains of teacher competence. Trained assessors collect data from teacher questionnaires, classroom observation, and interviews. This data is sent to ETS for processing and summary. Beginning teachers in BTSA would be linked with a support provider who is an experienced teacher and who would give assistance but would not evaluate performance. Of the approximately 165 beginning teachers in the 5 participating urban school districts, 45 were selected as the experimental group. Data will be analyzed to examine professional growth variables and beginning teacher perceptions. The large amounts of data collected will yield information on professional growth that has important implications for teacher retention and educational improvement. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

The Relationship Between Assessment and Support of Beginning Teachers: Where Do We Go From Here?

by

Joel A. Colbert, Diana E. Wolff, and Kim Trimble

for presentation at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 1994

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
JOEL A. COLBERT

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED 368 795

TM021324

Background

In 1988, the California State Legislature appropriated funds for a pilot project entitled the California New Teacher Project (CNTP). As its main purpose, the CNTP addressed the low retention rate of beginning teachers in California schools. Numerous studies had reported that more than a quarter of beginning teachers left the profession during the first five years. New teachers abandoned teaching in even greater numbers from urban, inner city schools (McLaughlin, et al., 1986; Estes, et al, 1990).

During its four years of operation, CNTP's 37 funded projects throughout the state reported dramatic increases in teacher retention. Colbert and Wolff directed two separate CNTP programs from 1988–92. The CNTP incorporated a variety of models for structuring support for new teachers and averaged a 97% retention rate statewide. Research which emerged from the projects confirmed that retention and success of new teachers was directly related to the projects' intensive site–based programs of support (Colbert and Wolff, 1992; Garmston and Bartell, 1991; Ward and Dianda, 1990).

In 1992, responding to these impressive data and concerned over the continuing difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified beginning teachers, the California State Legislature increased its commitment to beginning teacher support and assessment by passing SB 1422 (Bergeson), providing approximately $4.9 million for the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Project (BTSA). In the spring of 1993, the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Project funded 15

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

sites throughout the state. A second cohort of 15 additional projects was added in the winter of 1994. Plans call for continued expansion of BTSA funding to provide support to all beginning teachers throughout the state in coming years.

While both the CNTP and BTSA clearly share similar objectives, there is at least one notable difference in their mandates. Whereas the CNTP projects were focused on providing support for beginning teachers, the BTSA projects are required to include a well–defined assessment component, in addition to beginning teacher support. In fact, roughly half of the funds available to each project was to be used to assess participating beginning teachers on classroom competencies identified by research supported by the state (Stansbury and Long, 1992). The funding agencies required that assessment serve as *another level of support* for beginning teachers (as opposed to using assessment in the traditional, i.e., evaluative, sense).

To assist applicants in meeting the assessment requirements, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the Department of Education held workshops at which assessment options were discussed. At one of these sessions, three organizations which had responded to the state's call for proposals for classroom assessment procedures, made presentations. Applicants were informed that they could choose to work with one of these organizations or develop their own assessment component, as long as it addressed the guidelines established by the state.

After consideration, we at the BTSA project at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), chose to use the Educational Testing Service's (ETS) Praxis III assessment program. As presented at the state–sponsored meetings and in ETS literature, Praxis III had been carefully aligned with the teaching domains identified by previous research as important for the competence of all teachers and had been developed and tested in multicultural settings (Villegas, 1990). Such an assessment instrument seemed appropriate for the highly diverse and challenging classrooms in the south Los Angeles County area served by CSUDH.

The CSUDH project is in collaboration with five urban school districts in the greater Los Angeles area. The majority of the beginning teacher participants are teaching on an emergency

credential, i.e., they have not had any preservice training. Most are currently enrolled in a credential program, earning their preliminary credential while teaching full–time.

The Praxis III assessment system is designed to provide data on nineteen criteria clustered into four domains. The four domains are: organizing content knowledge for student learning, creating an environment for student learning, teaching for student learning, and teacher professionalism. Trained assessors collect data from three sources: two pre–observation questionnaires completed by the beginning teacher, a carefully scripted classroom observation, and pre– and post–observation interviews with the beginning teacher. Following the observation process, the assessor reads through all of the data collected and assigns each piece of information to one of the criteria to which it relates. Using these data, the assessor writes a summary statement that reflects the teacher's performance on the criterion and assigns a rating. The collected and categorized data, summary statements, and ratings are recorded and sent to the ETS, where they are processed. Both the beginning teacher and the BTSA staff receive copies of the summary statements for each of the nineteen criteria. ETS also provides additional numerical summary information to the BTSA staff.

Preliminary Concerns

In the fall of 1993, initial comments from beginning teachers and assessors alerted the BTSA staff to possible problems with the assessment process. In the first few months of the project, a number of beginning teachers withdrew from BTSA, citing the anxiety created by the assessment for their decision. Anecdotes from assessors also hinted at broad–based apprehension among the beginning teachers towards the assessors' classroom observations. The staff's concern was heightened after the administration of a questionnaire to all beginning teachers following the first of the three classroom assessments. A large number of these beginning teachers cited as problematic: the amount of time needed to complete the assessment forms prior to the classroom observation visit; the stress and anxiety of being assessed; and, the lack of timely feedback.

Prior to this, in informal staff discussions, we began to raise questions about the validity of using a highly structured assessment program as a support mechanism for first–year teachers. Another area of concern for us was the number of assessments that would be most appropriate for our purpose, i.e., using Praxis III as another layer of support. Frankly, staff were concerned about the notion of using a structured assessment procedure in a context other than evaluation, i.e., as a support mechanism, because, no matter how we presented assessment or called it by any other name, the concept of assessment means evaluation to most people and often results in stress and anxiety for participants. At about the same time, events pushed us to make an important decision.

During the early fall of 1993, three of our trained assessors withdrew from the program for a variety of personal reasons. Faced with the options of "borrowing" assessors from other projects which were as strapped for trained assessors as we were, or conducting additional assessments ourselves, we decided to assess one–quarter of the beginning teachers only once at the end of the year, instead of three times during the year, to compare the effects of multiple assessments versus a single assessment.

Literature Review

With this decision made, we began in earnest to examine the research literature on assessment and beginning teachers. Specifically, we were interested in exploring the role of assessment in assisting beginning teachers to improve their classroom teaching.

As evaluation or assessment[1] of teachers seemed to be a common component of many induction programs (Schaffer, et al. 1992; Littleton, 1991; Carter, et al. 1992) we were surprised to find so little evidence of its benefits in the support of beginning teachers. Only Moore (1990) clearly saw the evaluation component as having noticeable positive effects, reporting that the majority of teachers in an induction program believed that the evaluation information they received from their mentors was helpful.

A much more common theme centered upon the pitfalls of using assessment in induction programs. Successful induction of novice teachers into the profession seemed to be built on trust and concern among participants (Debolt, 1989). Assessment (usually founded upon hierarchical structures and unequal power bases) and mentoring (marked by approachability and encouragement) can be a volatile mix, requiring a careful and light hand (Heller and Sindelar, 1991; Wasserman and Emery, 1989). Some researchers, such as Klug and Salzman (1990), noted that effective induction programs seem to emphasize assistance over evaluation, while others (Bas–Issac, 1989; Heller and Sindelar, 1991) warned that mixing evaluation and mentoring threatened to weaken or destroy the effectiveness of the induction process. Consistent with these findings, Hoffman and O'Neal (1985) found that their assessment component was seen as insignificant in helping teachers improve. Further, for some beginning teachers, it "caused irritation and even hostility" (p. 18).

Berliner (1989) conducted research which provided a theoretical basis for our concerns. He described five theoretical stages of development that teachers progress through, while admitting, "we have only the scantiest knowledge about the ways that one progresses from novice to expert" (p. 39). Nevertheless, "the evaluation of teachers also depends on such implicit theories of development." (p. 40). He continued,

> "What one chooses to observe or test for, when one expects to see it, how it should be measured, and the criteria by which successful performance is judged all depend on some notions, perhaps fragmentary, about the development of ability in pedagogy" (p. 40).

He argued that

> "until extensive classroom experience has been acquired, there may be too little in the minds of preservice teachers about what actions might be realistic, relevant, appropriate, moral, and so forth. Any analysis of teachers' actions and the practical arguments that they make to justify them, must be well contextualized, and thus requires extensive experience"(p. 64).

The research literature added weight to the concerns that we had begun to develop from our informal interactions with the participants in our program. Assessment of beginning teachers may create high levels of stress and anxiety for individuals already faced with a myriad of difficult new tasks and responsibilities. If, further, its implementation is both expensive and time–intensive, the rationale for its use would have to be compelling. The literature was markedly silent on the issue of changes in teachers' classrooms skills and competencies related to assessment. Our focus, then, became clearer: (1) to determine whether repeated structured assessment during the first year of teaching is valid as a support mechanism given Berliner's arguments and our own data; and, (2) to document the effects on beginning teachers' perceptions of the profession related to using a repeated and structured assessment process.

Hypotheses

There are two hypotheses:

1. With intensive, structured, ongoing support for beginning teachers in place, repeated, structured assessment will have no significant effect on their professional competence.
2. With intensive, structured, ongoing support for beginning teachers in place, repeated, structured assessment will have no significant effect on their perceptions of the teaching profession.

Research Design

As with many research projects, our design emerged from and interacted with the realities of running a large support program. As originally conceptualized, a total of 180 beginning teachers would participate in the CSUDH BTSA project. Each of these beginning teachers was linked with a "support provider", i.e., an experienced, nurturing teacher who would provide support and assistance, but not evaluation. In addition, the teachers would be observed three times over the course of the academic year by a trained assessor using the Praxis III instrument.

Identification of beginning teachers started in the spring of 1993, with approximately 125 beginning teachers identified among the five participating urban school districts. By October, the number of beginning teacher participants increased to approximately 165. With the decision to implement the research project, 45 of these beginning teachers (roughly twenty–five percent of the anticipated 180) were randomly selected as our experimental group. This group would only be assessed during the third cycle in May, foregoing both the fall and spring assessments. The remaining participants (an anticipated 135) were to be assessed three times.

As the fall continued, additional beginning teachers were recruited from the participating school districts, with other beginning teachers dropping from the program for various reasons. As these late–arrivers (21 beginning teachers) joined the program after the assessment process had begun and had not received orientation to the Praxis assessment process, the staff decided that they would be treated in a manner similar to the experimental group, with only the late spring assessment being carried out.

With the number of participants seemingly stable, we count 187 beginning teachers. From this group, 121 (comparison group) will be assessed three times; 45 (experimental group one) were randomly chosen to be assessed only the third time, and the additional 21 (experimental group two) will receive only the third assessment because of their late enrollment in the program. For the purpose of analysis, experimental group two will be treated separately unless preliminary data analysis indicates that there are no differences between experimental groups one and two.

To accommodate the range of school calendars, student–free days, natural disasters, and special events among the five districts and sixty–five schools participating in the program, assessors were given flexible target dates for completing the three assessments. The first assessment was to have been completed by the end of January, the second by the end of March, and the third by the end of May. During this third assessment, all 187 beginning teachers will be assessed.

Data Collection

In attempting to determine the effects of the assessment process upon beginning teachers, we will draw on a number of data sources. First, scores for each beginning teacher on the Praxis III Assessment Instrument will be collected. For our comparison group of 121 beginning teachers, three separate scores for each of the nineteen criteria are expected. For the remaining beginning teachers, criteria scores will be collected only for the third and final assessment cycle. We recognize a limitation to these data in that the scale used in Praxis III is truncated, i.e., from 1.0 to 3.5 in 0.5 increments.

Additional information is also being collected to gauge other possible effects of the assessment process. As part of the support component of the project, beginning teachers and support providers attend a number of professional development workshops throughout the year on a range of topics identified at an early stage of the project through a needs assessment. At each session, participants fill out evaluations of the sessions that include open–ended questions about on–going aspects of the project.

Additional detailed information will also be collected from all project participants. In June, beginning teachers, support providers, and assessors will be asked to complete program questionnaire forms. Several questions on the form will request information about the effects of Praxis III upon professional skills and perceptions of the profession, school, and self.

From these responses, important issues will be identified and an interview protocol developed. A random sample of beginning teachers and support providers will be selected to be interviewed. These interviews will permit an in–depth exploration of participants' perceptions of all program components. These interviews will be taped and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed to examine professional growth variables and beginning teacher perceptions. The relationship of assessment to professional growth of beginning teachers as well

as their perceptions about the process may be also be related to retention.

We realize that we are collecting data on a large number of variables. These data will require quantitative and qualitative analysis as appropriate. Preliminary considerations have been discussed concerning the appropriate analysis tools. Professional growth variables, described below, will be analyzed using multivariate statistical procedures, such as multivariate analysis of variance and multiple regression. The second set of variables, beginning teacher perceptions, also described below, will be analyzed using content analysis procedures.

Professional growth

Data from the Praxis III instrument will allow us one measure of the growth of the beginning teachers' professional competence from the time they began in the program (spring, 1993 or fall, 1994) to the end of the 1993–4 academic year. By examining differences in assessor ratings on each of the nineteen criteria from the first to the third assessment, we will develop a performance growth profile for each beginning teacher. Another measure will be support provider perceptions, as measured by questionnaire, of their beginning teacher's proficiency at the end of the year.

More interesting data are likely to emerge from further comparisons. As assessment is seen as another level of support within the context of the BTSA projects, we may see differences in pedagogical competence and/or teacher perceptions that contribute to teaching effectiveness and retention. Because our experimental group(s) of the beginning teachers will be assessed only at the end of the year, they will not have received this aspect of support. Using data collected from this single assessment, we will construct a similar performance profile for them. This profile will represent a "snapshot" of their professional competence on the nineteen criteria at the end of the year. As they did not participate in the year–long assessment process, these ratings would reflect only benefits from the support component. By comparing the ratings of these two groups, i.e., those who were assessed three times and those who were assessed once at the end, we will have a

better understanding of the relationship between beginning teacher support and assessment, and the effect each has on retention, professional competence, and perceptions about the field.

Beginning Teacher Perceptions

We will use several other sources to analyze perceptions of beginning teachers. Questionnaires following the initial assessment, evaluations completed after training sessions, and end–of–the–year questionnaires will be used to construct a set of perceptions. Perceptions of those in the comparison group and those in the experimental group(s) will be compared. As an additional source of data, transcripts from the interviews will be analyzed and coded according to themes that emerge.

Importance

Assessment is big business. In the state BTSA projects alone, nearly $2.5 million were allocated for the first year for assessment purposes. As suggested in the literature, however, the nature of the benefits–if any–to beginning teachers is unclear. Further, assessment of beginning teacher performance may have detrimental effects on teachers' perceptions that may interfere with their successful induction into the profession. This study looks directly at these critical issues. Its findings may have important implications for construction of teacher induction programs. Further, it may have powerful implications for the use of assessment with first year teachers for licensing or any other purpose. Finally, these findings may challenge unexamined assumptions about the role of beginning teacher assessment in improvement of California's schools.

Notes

1. While the terms "evaluation" and "assessment" are often given specific meanings in many contexts, we found that they seemed to be used interchangeably in most discussions of beginning teacher induction programs.

References

Bas–Issac, E. (1989). *Mentoring: A life preserver for the beginning teacher.* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education, San Antonio, Texas. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED315 404).

Berliner, D. (1989). Implications of studies of expertise in pedagogy for teacher education and evaluation. *New Directions for Teacher Assessment. Proceedings of the 1988 Invitational Conference*, Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 39–67.

Carter, K. et al. (1992). *A system for improving performance of first year teachers.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, San Antonio, Texas. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED351 298)

Colbert, J.A. & Wolff, D.E. (May–June, 1992) *Surviving in urban schools: A collaborative model for a beginning teacher support system.* Journal of Teacher Education, *43*(1), 193–8.

DeBolt, G.P. (1989). *Helpful elements in the mentoring of first year Teachers* (A report to the State Education Department on the New York State Mentor Teacher–Internship Program for 1988–89). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED316 501)

Estes, G., Stansbury, K., & Long, C. (1990). *Assessment component of the California New Teacher Project: First year report.* San Francisco, CA: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Garmston, S. & Bartell, C. (1991). *New teacher success: You can make a difference.* Sacramento: California Department of Education and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Heller, M.P. & Sindelar, N.W. (1991). *Developing an effective teacher mentor program.* (Fastback 319). Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Hoffman, J.V. & O'Neal, S. (1985). *Beginning teachers and changes in self–perceived sources of influence on classroom teaching practices* (Research Report #9067). Austin, Texas: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED266 095)

Klug, B.J. and Salzman, S.A. (1990). *Strengthening the team: An inclusive model of university/school district support for novice teachers.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, New Orleans.

Littleton, M. (1991). *Developing a university–based alternative teacher certification program.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED340 699)

McLaughlin, M., Pfeifer, P., Owens, S., &Yee, S. (1986). Why teachers won't teach. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 67, 420–426.

Moore, B.M. (1990). *First year teachers and the evaluation process*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston.

Schaffer, E. et al. (1992). An innovative beginning teacher induction program: A two–year analysis of classroom interactions. *Journal of Teacher Education , 43*(3), 181–192.

Stansbury, K., & Long, C. (Feb., 1992). *Assessment Component of the California New Teacher Project: Framework of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities for Beginning Teachers in California.* San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Villegas, A.M. (1990). *Culturally responsive pedagogy for the 1990's and beyond.* Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Ward, B. & Dianda, M. (1990). *California New Teacher Project independent evaluation: 1990–91.* Larkspur, CA: Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Wasserman, S. & Emery, D (1989). *Issues in beginning teacher support.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED304 441)